DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 068 946 CS 200 185

AUTHOR McPhail, Augustine H.
TITLE Accountability: Will It Improve Education?
INSTITUTION Mississippi State Dept. of Education, Jackson.
PUB DATE Apr 72
NOTE 12p.; Paper presented at the Spring Meeting of the Conference on English Education, Affiliate of National Council of Teachers of English (St. Louis, April, 1972)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.65 HC-$3.29
DESCRIPTORS Academic Achievement; Conference Reports; *Educational Accountability; Educational Change; Educational Objectives; *Educational Programs; Instructional Innovation; *Performance Contracts; Program Descriptions; Program Development; Program Planning; Relevance (Education); *School Responsibility; Speech; *Teaching Methods

ABSTRACT

This is a paper that presents a positive case for the adoption of accountability programs. A brief history of accountability is given. Some important terms relative to accountability are defined. They are: accountability, independent educational accomplishment audit, performance contracting, and educational engineering. Ways in which the accountability program can be successful are listed and some advantages of performance contracting are given. Lastly, expected changes in schools resulting from accountability programs are presented as follows: (1) The teacher role will change from information giver to learning director; (2) Schools will become more open and less group-oriented; (3) Curriculum will be more relevant; (4) Myths can be exposed and eliminated from the schools. Some experiments in accountability are sighted and a bibliography of 23 articles published between 1970-71 is given. (Author/AL)

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ACCOUNTABILITY: WILL IT IMPROVE EDUCATION?

Augustine McPhail, English Consultant

ED 068946

A Paper Delivered
at
CONFERENCE ON ENGLISH EDUCATION
Affiliate of National Council of Teachers of English
at the
Spring Meeting
in
St. Louis, Missouri
April, 1972

State Department of Education
Box 771
Jackson, Mississippi 39205

CS 200 185

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ACCOUNTABILITY: WILL IT IMPROVE EDUCATION?

The concept of accountability has attracted the attention of school administrators and others in a special way since 1966 and 1967. However, let me point out that the idea is not new. In ancient Greece and Rome teachers were held responsible for teaching their students certain information. They were paid accordingly.[1] In the nineteenth century, during the Victorian period in England, a 30-year experience with the principle of accountability in education provided information and practices not too far different from those we are observing today. In 1858, the Newcastle Report, commissioned in that year, gave the first comprehensive survey of English elementary education. It recommended "that public support for popular education be continued, but in order to increase pedagogical efficiency it recommended one significant change in the manner of distributing government grants. They should be given only to those schools and teachers who could show that (1) the average student attendance reached 140 days a year and (2) children had attained a certain degree of knowledge, 'as ascertained by the examiners appointed by the County Board of Education'."[2]

They were paid only for results in teaching. The examinations were based on performance criteria and administered to each age-grade, covering each of the "3R's." This proved to be a disaster, according to educators of that day. There were two reasons for this national failure:

> 1. The teachers whose professional future would depend upon their demonstrated success would concentrate all their efforts at the minimum level of proficiency which was plainly spelled out by the law. This would lower the quality of instruction of the lower classes whose well-being had been the chief concern of the commission.
>
> 2. The full burden of accountability rested on the school and the teacher.[3]

The attention which is being given to accountability one hundred years later is including the third component in the spectrum of this concept: the pupil--the recepient in the teaching process. The burden of accountability involves every facet of the functioning school. Without the inclusion of the learner, accountability is impossible. Everyone who is involved in the process of accountability is responsible for its success of failure.

Let us then look at some definitions of terminology relative to accountability:

1. Accountability is

   A. a goal, not a method of instruction.[4]

   B. the honoring of promises made by educators to children and their parents.[5]

   C. a three-part policy: (1) the measurable accomplishment of students, (2) "an independent educational audit", (3) a public report of the success or failure of the program.[6]

2. Independent educational accomplishment audit is a test of the student's progress by someone other than the teacher. It can be compared to a fiscal audit.

3. Performance contracting is

   An agent, public or private, entering into a contractual agreement to perform a service, will be held answerable for performing according to the agreed-upon terms within an established time period, and with a stipulated use of resources and performance standards.[7]

4. Educational engineering is performance contracting through a particular process.[8]

The recent interest in accountability can be attributed to many things, some of which are:

1. increased cost of education
2. not all the students are being educated
3. loss of public confidence in the schools as evidenced by failure of many bond issues
4. a new interest of educators in assessing success to teaching.

The important issue at hand is to see how accountability is improving education now, or how it can. Its advantages to the classroom teacher, to the community, and to the student are indicative of the prominent role it has taken in the educational field.

> If teachers are willing to develop, with their supervisors and community, exciting educational goals and to report to the community of their success, accountability creates innumerable opportunities for professional growth and experimentation in the classroom. With or without the threat of loss of income, or the incentive of added income, teachers could begin to assume a leadership role they have not had before.[9]

The student, who is, after all, the reason for the entire program, is benefited, according to an article in The Grade Teacher, Vol. 88, in April, 1971:

> Under present performance contracts, students, particularly those with a record of failure in school, should be able to succeed under the individualized teaching methods which seem to be the backbone of most programs. If the student does not progress, there is no point at all in the expenditure of more money. This is the point on which all accountability programs are based.[10]

Here, then, are some of the ways in which the accountability program can be successful:

> 1. It must be an important communications medium in a responsive environment through which members are informed of what is to be accomplished, by whom, and how; wide participation in the obtainment of organization goals must be invited; and the attention of top management must be focused on the accomplishment of individual employees' personal goals.
>
> 2. It must reflect an organizational philosophy that inspires confidence and trust in all the members.
>
> 3. It must be based in ethical principles and sound policies that can be implemented by a set of dynamic, flexible, and realistic standards, procedures, and practices.
>
> 4. It must clearly specify its purposes so that standards, procedures, and practices can be conformed to them.
>
> 5. It must be designed primarily to improve the performance of each member in his current job duties. Other effects, such as the acquisition and promotion decisions and the personal development of the employees' capacities, may accompany the main effect of improved job performance, but these must be considered merely by-products of the main process.
>
> 6. The manner in which the supervisor discusses his evaluation with the subordinate constitutes the core of the process. If this is handled poorly, the program, no matter how well designated and implemented, will fail.

7. To be effective and accepted, both those who use it and those who will be judged by it must participate in the design, installation, administration, and review of the total accountability system."

Some advantages of performance contracting are:

First, contracting facilitates the targeting and evaluation of educational programs. Many good instructional programs have not been given the opportunity to demonstrate their potential due to the lack of an effective delivery system at the school level. Recent critical evaluations of Title I of ESEA note this operational inadequacy. The performance contract approach, which utilizes a separate accounting procedures, fosters the objective evaluation of educational results and also the managerial processes by which these results were achieved.

Second, performance contracting for instructional services could introduce more resources and greater variability into the public school sector. Now, new programs are being offered to the public outside the school system; the process of fragmentation and competition has begun. Several large corporations are establishing franchised learning centers across the country. One company, for example, has at least 40 centers operating in the major cities of this country; 10 others are establishing centers in other cities. Performance-type contracts to improve student achievement in compensatory education are usually enacted between the parents and the franchisee. As a result, the parents pay for the schools' operations. As these franchised centers expand, parents may refuse to pay property taxes by defeating tax and bond issues. On the other hand, the performance contract approach would allow the school system to utilize the services and products of a particular firm or firms so that the public schools could be renewed through a turnkey process. Performance contracting can be looked upon as a means to foster and catalyze institutional reform within a school system, allowing systems to continue operations and to become competitive with private schools and franchised learning centers.

Third, the performance contract approach allows a school system to experiment in a responsible manner with low costs and low political and social risks. Both school officials and critics have expressed the need to determine the relative cost effectiveness of various instructional methods in contractor-operated centers, as well as upon incorporation into the particular schools. The performance contract approach not only allows for determination of these costs and benefits but also provides the bases for projecting initial adoption as well as operating costs when the system is introduced into the schools. In this way, the approach allows policy makers to make rationational choices when choosing new techniques for extension into standard classroom practice.

Fourth, the new "bill of rights in education," proclaiming the right of every child to read at his grade level, will undoubtedly generate great pressures upon school resources. If our schools are to make this right a reality, they might want to consider using performance contracting for the development and validation of new reading programs. Upon successful demonstration, districts can then adopt the program or portions thereof. The success of these programs will in large measure depend upon the ability of the school to skillfully design and execute performance contracts and then effectively incorporate the projects into its normal operation.

Fifth, performance contracting can play a significant role in school desegregation. One of the major fears of the white community (rightly or wrongly) is that black children, upon integration, will hold back the progress of white children. Through the performance contract approach, many of the previously segregated black children will have their academic deficiencies, if any, removed on a guaranteed achievement basis while they are attending the newly integrated schools. From this point of view, performance contracting would allow communities to desegregate in a nondisruptive, educationally effective, and politically palatable manner.

Finally, the approach creates dynamic tension and responsible institutional change within the public school system through competition. Leaders will now have alternatives to the traditional instructional methods when negotiating salary increases; performance contracting and its variant, performance budgeting, permit the authorities to couple part of a salary increase to increase in effectiveness.[12]

Expected changes in schools resulting from accountability programs are as follows:

1. The teaching role will finally change from information-giving to directing learning. In many classrooms, the person who is active more than a fraction of the time is the teacher, who is generally doing the following:

   (a) Preparing and delivering lectures or talks to students whose motivation for paying attention or whose interest in what is being covered may be insufficient.

   (b) Preparing, administering, grading and reviewing tests, assignments and homework, and covering the textbook, which, because of the methods applied and the materials generally available have little value in helping the students to learn or the teachers to judge their own effectiveness.

2. The schools' facilities will become more open, more flexible and less group-oriented.

> Students can learn as individuals or as members of a group. There are no alternatives in any specific learning situation. Group instruction has its values for motivation, for general direction, etc., but is contra-indicated for individual learning. The misuse of time and effort in attempting individual growth through sole or major reliance on group methods is monumental. Facilities encouraging individual instruction are essential in producing results.

3. The curriculum will become more relevant.

> When the emphasis moves from process to results, the whole environment becomes a source for schooling. "School" can then be held in businesses, homes, or through "bull" sessions. Teachers can be assisted by students and adults. Since the criterion is results, the process becomes open to a variety of input. Variety is the essence of motivation and can provide the realism so deeply desired by all who seek relevance in their schooling.

4. Outmoded myths and an incomplete educational tradition can be exposed and perhaps eliminated from the schools.[13]

Accountability, through numerous paths will, in my opinion, elevate the teaching profession to a higher status, will help to change the attitude of some students in a very positive way, will enable the teacher to evaluate her methodology without fear of exposure of possible inferior teaching practices, and to more efficiently use her time and training, and will effect a confident trust of the community in the school system to a greater degree than has been realized until this present time. This will be accomplished by combining the efforts and planning of the school administrator, the community, the student, and the teacher. The purposes and objectives of education will be realized to a larger degree when all of those involved assist in setting forth the goals.

Some experiments in performance contracting.

1. Texarkana, Arkansas
2. Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
3. Gary, Indiana
4. Dallas, Texas
5. Providence, Rhode Island
6. Flint, Michigan [14]

FOOTNOTES

1. Alan A. Small, "Accountability in Victorian England," Phi Delta Kappan, LIII (March, 1972), 438-9.

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid.

4. Judith Seltz, "A Teacher's Guide to Performance Contracting," The Grade Teacher, 88 (April, 1971), 32.

5. Ibid.

6. Ibid.

7. Leon Lessinger, "Engineering Accountability for Results in Education," Phi Delta Kappan, LII (Dec. 1970), 217.

8. Ibid., 218.

9. Seltz, "A Teacher's Guide to Performance Contracting," p. 35.

10. Ibid.

11. Felix Lopez, "Accountability in Education," Phi Delta Kappan, LII, No. 4 (Dec. 1970), 232.

12. Lessinger, "Engineering Accountability for Results in Education," p. 219-220.

13. Leon Lessinger, "The Powerful Notion of Accountability in Education, Journal of Secondary Education, 45, No. 8 (Dec. 1970), 344-5.

14. Lessinger, "Engineering Accountability for Results in Education," p. 225.

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